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Subject: WWAY3: Rabon Calls for Legislative Hearing on Cooper Pipeline Agreement

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By: WWAY News

Submitted: 03/07/2018--12:14 pm

WILMINGTON, NC (WWAY) — A Brunswick County Republican is calling for a legislative hearing about Gov. Roy Cooper's nearly \$58 million deal with the companies behind the proposed Atlantic Coast Pipeline.

Sen. Bill Rabon (R-Brunswick Co.), who chairs the Senate Rules Committee, said in a news release today he is calling for a legislative oversight hearing after a report by WRAL in Raleigh about how the Cooper administration came to control a \$57.8 million fund with money from Duke Energy and Dominion Energy, who want to build the 600-mile long pipeline that would stretch from West Virginia to Robeson County.

According to the report, the money was supposed to go to the state of North Carolina, but documents show Cooper's staff proposed changing it so that the money would go into an escrow account controlled directly by the governor. "The reason?" the story asks. "Cooper and his administration don't trust the Republican-controlled General Assembly."

"The WRAL report proves that Roy Cooper had his hand in the cookie jar and intentionally steered money out of the state treasury and into a personal 'slush fund' he could dole out at his whim," Rabon said in a statement.

Soon after Cooper announced the fund on the same day the state granted regulatory approval for the project, the Republican-led General Assembly passed legislation to redirect the money to schools along the pipeline.

In his news release, Rabon said the Cooper administration provided documentation about the pipeline fund to a single news outlet while refusing to provide the same records to lawmakers.

"This story raises more questions than it answers, and given the Cooper administration has spent weeks dodging simple questions and refusing to comply with the Public Records Act, I am asking Sen. (Phil) Berger and Speaker (Tim) Moore to include Gov. Cooper's pipeline scandal as an agenda item at the next meeting of the Joint Legislative Commission on Governmental Operations," Rabon said.

The governor's press office did not immediately respond to a request for comment this afternoon.

According to the WRAL story, "Cooper has since said he never intended to decide how the fund would be spent and that his executive order would have given authority to a board made up at least partly by experts. Much of the money would have been used to help companies and farmers in eastern North Carolina hook into distribution lines tied back to the pipeline, covering the cost of expensive last-mile infrastructure that has to be built before gas can flow, the administration has said."